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November 26, 1917

AN

ORATION,

PRONOUNCED AT THE REQUEST OF THE

Washington Light Infantry Company,

IN

NEWBURYPORT, JULY 24, 1822,

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

COMPANY'S TWENTY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY.

BY CALEB CUSHING.

NEWBURYPORT :

PUBLISHED BY E. W. ALLEN.

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1822.

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To the Officers and Members of the Light Infantry.

GENTLEMEN :

In consenting, agreeably to your desire, that the following oration should appear in print, I have considered that what was written and delivered at your request ought to remain wholly at your disposal:—to which it is therefore cheerfully submitted, by your grateful associate and obedient servant,

C. CUSHING.

ORATION.

MY FELLOW-SOLDIERS:

WE commemorate, on this day, the formation of one of those independent military corps, which, whether in the trying moments of civil discord or of foreign warfare, have invariably proved the incorruptible and invincible guardians of our country's honor. It is not the mercenary courage of a hireling soldiery, whom nothing but the lust of rapine inspires, nor the blind prowess of barbarian hordes, whose home is the camp and whose trade is war, that we are now assembled to celebrate.—Our soil is guarded by no venal pretorian cohorts, like the profligate bands, which thronged the palaces of the imperial city, revelling on the spoils of the noblest, the wisest, and the best in fallen Rome. No armed multitudes are swarming in our land, to trample upon and lay waste the hopes of the husbandman, or to pitch their tents in the heart of plundered villages and intimidated capitals, like the stipendiary troops, which rally beneath the standard of legitimacy in modern Europe. Instead of a military force like this, the scourge, rather than safeguard, of those unhappy countries which

rely upon it for protection, we place our unshaken trust in a free-spirited militia, that is identified with the people themselves, out of whose lap it springs, and in whose bosom it is nourished. And on this occasion, when we meet here to commemorate the institution of the corps to which we belong, on what can we more appropriately fix our attention than upon the patriotic achievements of the brave militia of America?

From the time of the earliest emigration of our forefathers, through all the subsequent vicissitudes of our history, down to the present day, that militia has been trained to acts of courage, resolution, and zeal for its country's service. Our ancestors landed in a wilderness inhabited by savages who were fierce, hardy, and warlike, and too proud of the blessing of freedom to be willing tamely to submit their necks to the invader's yoke, or to suffer their green forests and wild mountains to be wrested away from them, without an obstinate struggle for the mastery. With such foes, as implacable when injured, as they were untameable in spirit, and averse to civilization, the primitive settlers of our country were forced every day to contend.

Hence arose the necessity that our fathers should be as familiar with the use of arms as of their household utensils;—that from the cradle to the grave they should be habituated to deeds of daring hardihood;—that when they lay down to rest they should be prepared to awake to the light of their burning hamlets, and to the war-whoop of the howling savage. They could not set apart a portion of their number for the security of the rest, because they were few, scattered over an extensive region, embosomed in the depths of solitary wilds, and

encompassed about on all sides by watchful enemies, ever ready to lift the tomahawk against the defenceless white man. It was a service, therefore, where no condition was free, no age entitled to exemption:—a warfare, from which there was no discharge. When the print of the savage's footstep was traced in the morning dew, or the flash of his musketry gleamed from the forest, or his fearful shout broke upon the stillness and repose of the night, all must then stand up boldly for the defence of whatever the heart of man holds most dear:—the youthful stripling, hardly yet ripened into "the bone of manhood", and the gray-headed sire, stricken by the hand of time, and trembling on the verge of eternity, no less than the warrior, in the pride of his strength, and the vigor of his mature but unimpaired age.

In these incessant wars, which our ancestors waged with the aboriginal lords of the soil, there was much more, likewise, that was calculated to teach lessons of unshrinking fortitude and dauntless courage, than there is in the ordinary warfare of civilized life. The savage was a foe with whom all seasons and all hours were alike;—who would surprise you at the domestic fireside amid the howlings of a wintry storm, or steal upon you in the solitude of a bright and starry summer's eve. The priest at the altar, as he lifted up his voice in prayer to minister in the solemn services of religion, might be arrested in the performance of his functions, to behold the consecrated walls of the sanctuary wrapt in flames, or its floor stained with the blood of the assembled worshippers, by the hand of the profane savage, to whom no place was sacred, no time holy.—Amid all the depravity of modern warfare, the wanton devastation it

occasions, and the misery it inflicts on all within the sweep of its arm, there may generally be discerned a sentiment of respect for the ties of private life, which often mitigates the rage of the most ferocious armies. But the savage was not more indefatigable in the pursuit of means to glut his vindictive passions, than he was merciless in their gratification. He would as readily wreak his vengeance on the helpless and smiling babe as on the mailed and gauntleted warrior,—on the virgin, whose cheeks were tinted with the first bright vermeil blush of maiden loveliness, as on the foeman, who had awakened his wrath, and would gladly have abode its violence. When the hatchet was once dipped in blood, then the plumed and painted chieftain gave loose to all the wildness of his unreclaimed nature. He, as he chased his game along the boundless savannah, or launched his canoe over the vast expanse of our inland seas, or penetrated the shades of the pathless and untrodden forest, or caused mountains, over which the untired eagle but seldom soared, to ring with the shrill echoes of his war-cry, felt more proud and pre-eminent, in the grandeur of his savage loneliness, than the haughtiest of eastern despots environed with all the pomp of imperial magnificence. No defeat, therefore, could break his spirit, no reverses had power to subdue his resolution. His followers might be scattered in flight, the best and boldest of his tribe left lying lifeless on the field of battle, and his strength seemingly crushed and annihilated by the conqueror;—and you might believe that your enemy was now quelled, and that you could at length repose in security and peace.—But no:—the oak of the forest had only been scathed, it was not consum-

ed, and would again stretch forth its stubborn branches to brave the lightnings and to defy the storm.—You would encounter the red warrior where you looked the least for his terrible presence, crouching, like the cougar, ready to spring upon his unsuspecting prey ; or, when you thought him far away in the hidden recesses of the wilderness, his yell would arouse you from sleep at midnight only to close your eyes again in the deeper slumber of death.

Thus it was, in a state of such protracted hostility, that the military force of America grew up, while the colonists were combating with their savage neighbors, for a century and a half, until a disciplined militia was organized to protect the whole country, from the shores of the Lakes, skirting along the Atlantic ocean, to the magnolia-swamps and sultry plains of Georgia. And the crisis was now arrived, when that country, driven by a long series of intolerable wrongs to make a desperate stand in vindication of her claim to the privileges of a free nation, unfurled the banner of independence, and called upon all her true-hearted sons to assemble wherever her eagle flew, or her stripes waved on high, to espouse her sacred cause. The hour of her utmost need was now come. She demanded the services of men, who would fly to the tented field as to a banquet, and meet the shock of battle calmly and firmly, as knowing that, if they fell, they would sink to rest, like the descending sun, amidst “the dew-fall of a nation’s tears ;”—and she found them in the ranks of her militia. No sooner were the tyrannical measures, adopted by the mother-country for our subjugation, unfolded by the stirring eloquence of an Otis or a Henry, than the flames

of war were kindled throughout the land, and flew with electric swiftness from the St. Croix to St. Mary's. At their country's summons, our brave yeomanry sallied forth, as the innumerable rivulets issue out of our native mountains, gathering new strength from every green hill which they pass, and in every fertile valley through which they flow, until they unite into one mighty torrent, that proudly holds onward its destined course irresistibly to the deep.—On the plains of Lexington, the British soon learnt that a determined people, united in defence of their liberty, were capable of defying all the force of disciplined armies; and might have learnt, if they had listened to the voice of experience, that men, who fought so desperately on Breed's-Hill, beside the smouldering ruins of Charlestown, and even in sight of their capital garrisoned with foreign soldiers and their waters pressed under the weight of hostile navies, would never submit to be slaves, so long as a single brave heart survived to maintain the cause of independence and of America.

You do not need to be reminded, on this occasion, of the familiar incidents of our revolutionary story;—of that enthusiastic love of liberty, which sustained the heroes and statesmen of that day amid all the vicissitudes of a disastrous war, and finally brought them to that happy consummation, which they had so ardently struggled to accomplish. Nor do you need to be reminded that it was accomplished, not by means of standing armies, not by foreign mercenaries, but by the vigor of a military force composed of the patriotic yeomanry of the country. And who, that saw the unbounded devotion to the cause wherein they were enlisted, which an-

imated all their breasts as with one individual soul, would have presumed to doubt of their final success?—As they mustered in their native villages, the ministers of religion invoked the benediction of heaven upon the heads of those, who drew the sword to guard their homes from invasion, their green fields from devastation, their wives and daughters from the licentious ravisher, their temples from conflagration;—and could they fail to conquer, fighting thus under the consecrated standard of their country, with the prayers of the righteous, like Moses with his hands uplifted against the children of Amalek, pleading for victory at the throne of God?

The memorable events of that stormy period are now gone to take their place among the records of the past, and the few surviving actors in them, who yet linger among us, seem already to belong rather to history than to the shifting scenes of the present age. In the mean time, the petty and despised colonies have become consolidated by a stable league into a mighty republic, whose ships throng every sea, and carry the terror of her name into the remotest corners of the habitable earth. Her territory is no longer straightened within the narrow chain of the Alleghany, but the tide of her population has overflowed the mountains upon the immense valley of the Mississippi, and swelled out her boundaries into an empire more wide and magnificent than all the countless kingdoms, that were partitioned among the Roman Triumvirs.—And while these stupendous changes have been silently effecting in the condition of our country, have the descendants of the Pilgrims lost their fathers' characteristic zeal for civil and religious freedom?—Have we proved unworthy of the blood, which beats in

our pulses, and throbs at our hearts?—Have we degenerated from the examples of bravery and patriotism set before us by the heroes of the revolution?—Did the militia of America become enervated in the long series of peaceful and prosperous years, which succeeded the acknowledgment of our independence?—No:—a second war with Great Britain, although entered into without the full and hearty co-operation of the whole country, yet eventuated so gloriously for our military reputation, as to prove that *the spirit of seventy-six* still animated the frames of our gallant yeomanry: for this spirit it was, which sustained us in the battles of Chippeway and Niagara, and which, in the defence of New-Orleans, enabled us to repulse the invader from all the hundred mouths of the American Nile.

If it were for the interest or the honor of America to tread in the footsteps of the Alexanders of ancient or the Napoleons of our times, and to indulge in those ambitious schemes of conquest, which have deluged with blood the most beautiful regions of the world,—then, indeed, our militia would cease to be sufficient for us, and our country would be compelled to levy and maintain a regular military force, like the vast standing armies, which impoverish the governments of Europe and Asia. But then, likewise, we should be compelled to follow the chariot wheels of some aspiring conqueror, and bend the knee to some military despot, who, lifted up into dangerous eminence by the splendor of his victories, and too powerful in the support of warlike retainers accustomed to obey his voice, would be tempted, like Cæsar, to turn against his country that sword, which was placed in his hands only to be employed in vanquishing her foes. We

must then bid farewell to the free constitution, which our fathers bequeathed us. But until that event happens,—and far,—far distant may the time be when it shall happen!—an independent militia is the true and only fit defence of our republic, against any danger whatsoever, whether arising out of domestic faction among ourselves, or out of hostilities threatened us by others ;—because an enlightened people, with arms in their hands and liberty in their hearts, ever were and ever will be invincible.

The laurels of the hero are dearly purchased with the blood of thousands, whom his triumphant march sweeps from his path. Imposing as may be the splendid scene of his silken banners floating on the breeze,—his waving plumes and bright armor,—steeds prancing and pawing the earth with their impatient hoofs at the thrilling voice of his trumpet,—all the pomp and all the magnificence, with which the vanity of human greatness toils to array the conqueror, cannot conceal the dismay which flies before him to proclaim his approach, nor the misery which tracks his progress. But, although war is always thus calamitous in its consequences, so long as mankind heed the commands of ambition rather than right, and so long as ill-governed countries contain a redundant population of needy and profligate men for the sword to devour,—so long must we expect for the continuance of blood-shed and violence perpetrated under the sanction of national authority. And our security, therefore, as a free people, depends upon our being always prepared to repel insult. The Father of his Country has taught us that, to preserve peace, it must be known we are at all times ready for war. It must be

known that, if aggressions are made on our commerce, our navies will soon be seen riding in the waters of the spoiler, and the thunder of our cannon will be heard on his shores. It must be known that, if hostile squadrons dare again set foot in our land, they will find it guarded by as resolute champions of independence as in the days of Washington.

You will not, I trust, my fellow-soldiers, consider these remarks inapplicable to the present occasion. You belong to a company of militia, which, for twenty-two years, has held a respectable standing among the first independent corps of your native state, and numbered, in its ranks, men who would do credit to any situation in society. And I feel the more proud, therefore, in addressing you, when I reflect that, excellent as the discipline and organization of the Company have been hitherto esteemed, it was never, perhaps, in a condition more honorable to itself and to the town than it is now, when its ranks are filled with the children of its original founders, and with young men animated with that emulous love of renown, which adorns and distinguishes the morning of life. I feel proud, therefore, in addressing men, who are conscious that they have the honor of their predecessors, as well as of themselves, to maintain. Yes, fellow-soldiers ;—bearing, as we do, the name of Washington, it is incumbent on us to approve ourselves worthy to be classed with that undaunted militia of New-England, which, in times past, withstood the martial enthusiasm of the Pequots,—which dissipated the fearful confederacy of the Delaware, Narraghansett and Abenaki Indians with the crafty and sagacious Philip of Mount-Hope at their head,—which defended the coun-

try against the multiplied and pertinacious incursions of the Iroquois;—and which, has since coped successfully with the misnamed Queen of the Sea. We are not associated for mere festival exhibition,—to glitter in the parade of a gala-day, and then steal away into forgetfulness of the great end and aim of our institution; but those arms were entrusted in our charge, and we were marshalled in this warlike array, to keep alive in our breasts the sacred fire of patriotism. And who is there among you, that will suffer that divine flame to be extinguished but with expiring life?—Who is there, that would betray his country?—Who, that would ignominiously sell her for gold, like the traitor Arnold, and not rather resist unto death for the vindication of her fame, like the sainted Montgomery?—I know that I may answer for you, none,—none:—none is here so rude, that he will not love his native land, none so base, that he would live a bondman, none so vile, that he does not exult in the name of American.

The savage inhabitants of your country have sunk, with their congenial forests, before the overwhelming march of refinement, or, if they still linger among you, are a scanty and scattered remnant, the objects of curiosity still, or of compassion, but not longer of dread. Your vales will never again resound with the red chieftain's war-whoop; for the days of his glory are gone, and the independence of his spirit has been broken down under the accumulated pressure of the arts and the arms of civilization. The vigor and fleetness of his limbs abandon him, while the unwelcome garb of his masters displaces the flowing robe, that hung, in free and graceful folds, around his belted frame. As the glit-

tering wampum has ceased to encircle his brow, so the fire, that once lighted up his eagle-eye, is quenched. His soul lost forever its native elasticity, when the luxuriant wilds, that nourished it, and the deep solitudes, through which he had been accustomed to wander, undivided lord of hill and dale, of river and lake,—were ravished from him by his insatiate victors. He, therefore, can be no more a source of apprehension.—But although the red races have melted away from before you, as the dew vanishes from the hill-side beneath the rays of morning,—although the revolution has already been effected, and your independence, by the blessing of heaven, is now established on an immoveable foundation,—still much remains for you to do:—for you have the constitution of your country to secure from violation, and the brightness of her fame to preserve untarnished. And citizens as you are, of a country, that was the first to burst asunder the chains of feudal slavery, with which all her kindred nations were enthralled,—the first to enter upon the path of liberty, and hold on her course without shrinking in that illustrious career,—the first to afford the new world an example, and an example since so nobly imitated by our brethren in the south, of the practicability of escaping the tyranny of transatlantic rulers,—and the first to acquire one of those free, firm, and consistent constitutions, the demand for which is now convulsing the antiquated governments of Europe;—citizen-soldiers of such a country, you would, I doubt not, if her service required it, exhibit the same manly intrepidity in maintaining, that your fathers manifested in creating, the glorious pre-eminence of America.





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